

XXV.—*Letters, Extracts, Notices, &c.*

We have received the following letters addressed to the Editors of 'The Ibis : '—

Northrepps, 11th December, 1886.

SIRS,—The following extracts from a letter just received from my friend Mr. Samuel Bligh, of Catton, near Koslande, Ceylon, will, I think, be of interest to ornithologists :—

"An Eagle a friend shot about six miles from this place and sent to me is a very interesting specimen, being the first dark-plumaged bird of *Limnaëtus ceylonensis* that I have seen, which is very strange, considering the number I have had in the flesh and the many that I have watched with my telescope.

"On skinning this specimen I noticed that the bones and muscles were very mature and firm, the bones had even a yellowish or old ivory look; the eye was bright orange-yellow; the bill black, with plumbeous and olivaceous tinges at the gape; the cere blackish brown, tinged with olive; the toes dull ochreous yellow, with a tinge of olive. On the whole, I think the bird comes under Col. Legge's description of a bird three or four years old.

"In the stomach were the remains of a chicken, freshly swallowed, and of another bird too much digested to identify. The Eagle was in capital condition.

"A very fine adult female of *Huhua nipalensis*, shot about ten miles from hence, was lately sent me; its eyes were brown, bill uniform horny yellow, with the slightest tinge of green; in the stomach were the remains of frogs and crickets."

Yours &c.,

J. H. GURNEY.

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22nd February, 1887.

SIRS,—I am obliged by your suggestion of a reference to Baird, Brewer, and Ridgway, with respect to my note on the breeding-plumage of *Podiceps occidentalis*. The reference

had not escaped me, but as it added nothing to our previous knowledge of the subject, I did not allude to it. The description as given on page 422 of the 'Water-birds of North America' is:—

“Adult, full breeding-plumage. Pileum and nape slaty black, &c.

“Adult (and young) in winter. Similar, but pileum and nape brownish slate, like the back.”

This is the only distinction given. It is therefore perfectly evident that the writer had not seen a breeding bird, but possibly an adult just about to assume the nuptial dress. There is no mention of the glossy green-black crest, the silvery-white throat and ear-coverts, with the rich chestnut border, by which, as Prof. Baird anticipated, it makes “a grand display,” and not a mere deepening of the winter grey colour of the head. It would have been strange, indeed, were the largest and finest of the Grebe-kind content with merely darkening its head-dress at the nuptial season.

Yours &c.,

H. B. TRISTRAM.

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*Birds of the Afghan Boundary.*—In his memoir on the “Fauna and Flora of the Afghan Boundary,” read before the Linnean Society on February 3rd last, Dr. Aitchison gives the following account of his ornithological work:—“As regards birds, 123 species, belonging to some 84 genera, were collected, while 14 other species were identified, though not preserved. Two new species only were procured, viz. a Pheasant, *Phasianus principalis*, and a Woodpecker, *Gecinurus gorii*. The birds in Afghanistan are chiefly migratory, with the exception of the above new Pheasant, Raven, Rook, Carrion Crow, Jackdaw, Sparrow, Starling, Sky Lark, Crested Lark, Bokhara Lark (*Melanocorypha bimaculata*), Wall Creeper (*Tichodroma muraria*), Bittern (*Botaurus stellaris*), several Raptores, Sand Grouse (*Pterocles arenarius*), and Red-legged Partridge (*Caccabis chukar*). As spring advances, birds are seen to arrive, following each other rapidly, such as *Aedon fami-*

*liaris* and various species of *Sylvia*, *Saxicola*, *Lanius*, *Motacilla*, *Pastor*, *Merops*, and *Coracias*. Various Ducks then leave the country, but the Brahminy Duck or Ruddy Sheldrake, *Casarca rutila*, remains throughout the year and breeds there. The greater number of the species met with belong to the genera *Saxicola* (8), *Lanius* (6), *Sylvia* (5), *Motacilla* (5), and *Emberiza* (4).”

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*Dr. Radde's Trans-Caspian Expedition.*—Dr. Radde writes to us from Tiflis that he brought back with him from his Trans-Caspian Expedition 12 specimens of *Ovis arkal*, 850 bird-skins, and a large series of reptiles, besides other spoils. The collections are now being worked out by various experts, and the results will, it is estimated, require a work of four volumes to contain them. He has obtained examples of most of Mr. Blanford's Persian species.

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OBITUARY. *Mr. Robert Gray, F.R.S.E.*—It is with much regret that we record the death of Mr. Robert Gray, of Edinburgh, on the 18th of February. To southern ornithologists he is best known by his most important work, ‘The Birds of the West of Scotland,’ published in 1871, and which continues to be the standard authority for that portion of the country; but he also wrote ‘The Birds of Ayrshire and Wigtownshire,’ and contributed many papers to the ‘Proceedings’ of the Royal Society of Edinburgh (of which he was a Vice-president), the Royal Physical Society (of which he was Secretary), the Glasgow Natural History Society, and other periodicals. The genial presence of this veteran naturalist will be much missed at the scientific and other gatherings which he frequented in Edinburgh and Glasgow.